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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RANGOON 000487

SIPDIS

STATE FOR EAP/BCLTV; PACOM FOR FPA

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [BM](#) [MY](#)

SUBJECT: BURMA: MALAYSIAN AMBASSADOR BELIEVES GOB WILL
POSTPONE BANGKOK II

REF: A. RANGOON 471

[B](#). RANGOON 481

[C](#). KUALA LUMPUR 1403

[D](#). BANGKOK 2527

Classified By: COM Carmen Martinez for Reasons 1.4 (b,d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Malaysia's ambassador to Burma believes that the GOB is "firm" in wanting to postpone the April 29-30 Bangkok II meeting in order to avoid "getting clobbered" by the international community. Nonetheless, he believes that the signs are good ASSK will be released soon and assesses that the NLD would be foolish to boycott the National Convention. The Malaysian ambassador, more informed and insightful than many of his ASEAN colleagues, gave us the impression that Malaysia may use the Bangkok meeting and other upcoming venues to press the SPDC to make more progress. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (C) On April 19 COM and P/E chief met with Malaysian Ambassador Dato Cheah Sam Kip, continuing our round of calls on Rangoon missions to discuss recent developments, including preparations for a potential second meeting of the "Bangkok Process" on Burma (ref A).

[1](#)3. (C) Ambassador Cheah said that Malaysia had not yet decided who to send to Bangkok II, scheduled for April 29-30, but noted that his Foreign Minister had already received an invitation from the Thai Government (RTG). He expressed pleasure that Malaysia had been invited, noting somewhat bitterly that neither the RTG nor the GOB had wanted his country at the table for the initial meeting in December. Cheah, observing that Malaysia had provided strong support for Burma's effort to join ASEAN, said that the "SPDC is very good at turning its friends into its enemies."

[1](#)4. (C) According to Ambassador Cheah, the GOB has taken a firm stance on postponing the Bangkok II meeting. Despite Thai FM Surakiart's quick trip to Rangoon on April 10 to press the GOB to stick to the meeting as scheduled (ref D), the Burmese "do not want to go to Bangkok and get clobbered, which will happen if Aung San Suu Kyi is not released." Cheah agreed with the COM's observation that SPDC Chairman Than Shwe was fearful of letting ASSK free to conduct party business and the ambassador added that international reaction, including that of Malaysia, would be "very adverse" if the regime did not release her before reconvening the National Convention on May 17.

[1](#)5. (C) Cheah said that in his view the "signs are good" that ASSK will be released very soon. He noted that Special Envoy Razali was wrapping up a trip to Geneva and hoped to visit ASSK "just after" her release. However, if she is not released soon, he said, GOB participation in a Bangkok meeting would be of no value. Therefore, Cheah continued, absent further progress the Thai should not push to hold the meeting as scheduled. He added that the regime shows no desire to take on board suggestions from the international community and merely "tolerates" the visits of (Special Envoy) Razali and (Special Rapporteur) Pinheiro.

[1](#)6. (C) Ambassador Cheah said it would be "foolhardy" of the NLD to boycott the Convention process. "They absolutely must participate," he added, "and we will give ASSK that message." (Note: NLD CEC members told us later in the day that they are "offended" that some countries insist the party must partake in a process designed to rubber stamp a constitution that is already drafted (ref B). End Note)

[1](#)7. (C) Comment: Although we continue to have doubts about "signs" that ASSK's release is imminent, Ambassador Cheah was decidedly more informed and insightful than many of his ASEAN colleagues in Rangoon (ref A). He noted with delight that former Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir had in recent days apparently expressed disappointment with the pace of democratization in Burma and had expressed "regret" over bringing the country into ASEAN. Although available press reports indicate that Mahathir was more circumspect in his public remarks, Cheah intimated that Malaysia may seek to use Bangkok II or other upcoming venues to press the SPDC to make the National Convention and constitution drafting an inclusive and more open process. End Comment.
Martinez